

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT**  
**TOWN FOREST STEWARDSHIP SUBCOMMITTEE**  
**Minutes of September 29, 2020**

- I. **ROLL CALL:** In attendance were Russ Barrett, Lydia and Colin Bright, Nelson Hoffman, John Sears, and Brad Johnson.
- II. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):** None scheduled and no community members in attendance.
- III. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** Notes from 8/8/20 meeting were approved with two amendments from Russ and a second from Nelson. First, “FRP” was changed to “FPR” – Forests, Parks, and Recreation. Second, the new acronym for his committee will be “TFSC” from here on out.
- IV. **UPDATES AND NEWS FROM SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBER:** Lydia provided an update on the weekend fires in the Cheney field and strip of trees above the field. On Saturday, after seeing smoke coming from the ground and trying to put out the fire themselves, Lydia and her family called the Northfield FD to extinguish smoldering ground soil. On Sunday the fire warden was again up there extinguishing coals from another night time fire. Lydia has been in communication with Colin O’Neil at Norwich University to see if students were involved. The college has sent notification to students and they are building two designated fire pits, one at the Shaw Center and one by the quarry site. John asked about the possibility of putting up game cameras to monitor activity. While he liked this idea, Nelson pointed out that some users might be uncomfortable. He has seen groups of people walking up to the field on weekend evenings. Russ asserted that in general fires are not a big problem, but with increased user traffic and dry conditions the scenario is problematic now. Lydia and others wondered if removing the signs of old fires in the field might help deter others from starting fires and partying there, but the fire warden said that the one site with RR ties is good idea to help prevent fire spread in the field and adjacent woods. Brad pointed out that deforestation is another problem with having designated fire sites on town property. In the end, it was decided that the TFSC would come back to the issues of fire sites and game cameras at a later time, as there is much to consider there.

## V. DISCUSSION

- a. **Rogue Trails:** The new trail on the map Russ provided has no name but is getting increased mountain bike traffic. Russ has invited a community member who may have done some of the building to attend the next TFSC meeting, though it is unclear who all is responsible for the building. What is clear is that the trail starts off the Rock Garden on the Hawk Watch trail, traveling on town and private property down to the Forest Road. From there, the trail leaves the Forest Road and traverses town property, including a zone designated in the Town Plan as a Low Disturbance Area. All thought that this trail presents an immediate problem. Many in the group asked whether or not the TFSC has a process for the public to get new trails approved in the TF, and Colin reported that there is a plan but it has never been used. Nelson clarified that there are two related problems – what to do about this rogue trail and others, and how to establish a workable protocol for new trails to be proposed and ruled on by TFSC/NCC/NSB. Several committee members pointed out that there are at least three well established rogue trails already out there, in addition to the one in question, and Brad and Lydia both suggested that the committee consider approving them as permanent, maintained TF trails while also acting quickly to remove the rogue trail section that travels through the Low Disturbance Zone of the TF. Lydia noted that Strava GPS data indicates growing traffic on this trail. A host of ideas on public education/signage were discussed, and after a great deal of good discussion Russ asked for a motion to move the group ahead. Nelson moved that the new rogue trail running from Forest Road to the main trail just above the beaver pond be removed. A second came from John. The decision was also made that Brad will notify the private landowners with trail sections on their land and ask for their involvement in this matter and as well as on other rogue trail decisions that involve their property. Nelson will speak with community members who may have built some portions of the rogue trail to let them know the committee's plans for removal on TF land. Colin is going to send around details on the current process for getting new trails approved, and he will include data on the route of the Postal Trail, which the committee hopes will receive approval through this process. Russ wants to find a way to keep NU kids from building shelters on TF land, or at least taking them down when their activities are over. All agreed that a good TF map is critical so that the public can find their way on the trails, and also that public awareness and education needs to increase. Note that this discussion was lengthy and wide ranging, and this represents an effort to summarize debate and motions.

- b. **Mowing Cheney Field:** Lydia asked why in the last couple of years the field has not been mowed. She wanted to ask Jeff this question and noted that timing in the season is important from an ecological point of view. Others agreed on that point. Nelson reported that the Town Plan says mowing will occur at least once every three years and will be done in sections to accommodate wildlife considerations. It was noted that the town and the water district folks wish to maintain control over mowing timing. Colin detailed issues with the spread of invasive knotweed and urged that the mowing be done carefully so that the seeds are not further spread from the bottom of the field to the sections above the main roadway through the field. In the end, it was decided that Lydia would contact Jeff about mowing the whole field this fall, and then the TFSC will work with him and the water district to plan for future sectional mowing.
- c. **Signage:** Nelson began this discussion, saying that with all the new signage there seems to be a lack of coordination and uniformity that is creating unwanted visual impacts and confusion for public users. Russ told the TFSC that the new flagging and small white signs are the result of boundary marking by the NCC and will remain in place to designate hard to find TF boundary lines. Colin stated that we need the boundaries marked to encourage NU students to learn where they are. Lydia and others remarked that it is just plain confusing out there with all the signage. Russ reported that the different generations of signs are from town efforts, Boy Scout projects, NU marking, and more, and there is no standard marking system for trails or boundaries. Nelson volunteered to do a survey of what is out there now. Brad said that this issue to signs merits further future discussion, especially if we are considering a kiosk/trailhead with parking.
- d. **Other Business:** Brad brought up the evolving NU policy concerning where students can and cannot travel and recreate, asking how this might affect our TF planning. Several committee members noted the apparent double standard in the university's policy, now encouraging students to get off campus and into town, while also restricting the town from using NU trails and the Shaw Center. Colin asserted that the college's restrictions are impacting the TF as more recreational traffic is being pushed there. Nelson added that the TFSC has a right to address this matter with NU now. Lydia will draw up a letter to do so, and Russ with review, sign, and send to the college.

VI. **ADJOURNMENT:** Colin moved that the meeting be adjourned, and Brad followed with a second.